

How to Process a Deer

By Kit Hams, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

TOOLS: Knife, knife sharpener, saw to remove lower legs, garden hose, cooler, cutting board, Ziploc bags, permanent marker and freezer.

Assuming the deer has been field dressed and is cool and dry, you are ready to process the carcass.

Rule 1: If you can't sharpen a knife, don't even start. **Rule 2:** Keep the carcass as cool and dry. Forty degrees or cooler is best. Warm and moist tissue spoils quickly. **Rule 3:** Cut off anything you don't want to eat, including most fat. Discard blood shot meat. Be especially careful to remove any tissue contaminated by stomach or intestinal contents. **Rule 4:** Cut meat into pieces that fit in Ziploc bags, remove air, seal and freeze. Remove tendons and sinew now or before you cook it when you have more time. **Rule 5:** If you haven't butchered a deer before, get help, or start in the morning so you can learn as you go without being rushed. Cutting and packaging can be done on a card table in front of the TV and is best done with a friend or two.

The methods I use are as follows:

1. Remove skin. Hang deer by the head from a tree or tripod. Skin from the neck down (like removing a sock). This keeps hair from getting on the meat. Pull the hide down past the knee joints and cut off the lower legs with a saw, hatchet or knife.
2. Wash the carcass. Remove hair, dirt, blood and damaged tissue.
3. Remove the loins along the back bone. These make the best steaks.
4. Remove meat from the front and rear quarters and place in ice chest.
5. Front shoulder and neck meat is usually ground or stewed as it is tougher.
6. Hind quarter meat is best for steaks and roasts, but can be ground or stewed.
7. Package, label and freeze.

How much time does it take? Depending on your level of experience...

1-2 hours to skin, wash and quarter. 1 hour to remove the bones from the quarters. 2-6 hours to cut, package, grind and wrap.